LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODYING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,

AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF

THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My dear Dorillah:

As modern examples of Grecian Ionic architecture, I pointed out to you the General Post-office and the British Museum. I would add to these the elegant portico of St. Pancras Church in the New-road, imitated from the double Temple of Minerva Polias and Erectheus at Athens. I do so that you may notice also, at the east end of the same building, the introduction of figures to support an entablature instead of columns. These are called *caryatides*, and you will perhaps ask me, why? If we believed Vitruvius, this would be the answer. Carya, a city of Peloponnesus, took part with the Persians against the Grecian states. The Greeks captured their city, put all the males to the sword, and led the women into captivity; and then the architects of the time to perpetuate their ignominy, ungallantly substituted figures of these women for columns. But then there was a Carya, daughter of a king of Laconia, who, long before the time pointed to by Vitruvius, was transformed into a nut-tree, and through some connection difficult to see, the goddess Diana was worshipped as Diana Caryatis, and the statues called caryatides may have been first applied to the temples of this Diana. In Egypt, at a much earlier period, the face of pillars supporting an entablature was sculptured into the form of men, as in the temple at Ibsambul already mentioned. In Greek work, when male figures were used, they were called Telamones or Atlantes; Atlas carried the globe then: our "Atlas" merely represents it!

The whole life of the Greek was mythical: imaginative and subtle, he incarnated and worshipped everything he imagined, and natural phenomena and physical truths were symbolised in what now seem wild fables. The earth, the air, and the water were inhabited by beings higher than himself, but still personal, with human feelings and open to human influences. He had no Revelation to lead him further. A myth, then, you see, was not with him the polite word for a *falsehood*, whatever may be the acceptation of it now.

Their mythology helped their art: the sculpture of the Greeks stands alone,—unapproached. To give you a glimpse of the Grecian sculptors as they lived, I am tempted to repeat to you the story of "Phidias and Alcamenes," as it is told for me by Blondel, in his *Cours d'Architecture*, though it is rather a long one. I wish, writes Blondel, I could relate the adventure as agreeably as it is told in the Chyliades of Tzetzes, a Greek poet. These two sculptors, he says, lived at the same time, with reputation, at Athens. Alcamenes belonged to those who, with but mediocre merit, make a great deal of noise; spending the greater portion of his time in paying his court to the people, and in looking out for intriguing friends who might cry up his works; which is a very good way of making one's self a reputation and acquiring wealth. Howbeit, such people often behold their fame die out, even during their life. Phidias, on the contrary, passed his whole time in the study of his art, and in that of optics and geometry, which sciences he considered necessary to the attainment of perfection. He courted no one, and esteemed himself happy in the approbation of a few well-informed persons, whom his merit had made his friends; which is, adds our author, a sure way of being poor during one's life, and of being rich in glory and immortal reputation, after one's death.

Well, these two masters received orders, at the same time, to set to work on two statues, which the people of Athens wished to set up on lofty pillars which they had had erected before the temple of Minerva. Alcamenes wrought his statue with all possible delicacy, finishing off to the eye the whole work to the minutest feature; a proceeding which gave exceeding pleasure to the people, and increased infinitely the reputation of this sculptor. But Phidias, who, by the knowledge he had of optics, knew the effect which his figure ought to produce when it was raised to the place for which it was intended, made the face thereof of a monstrous width, the eyes staring horribly, the nostrils swollen, the mouth a gash; setting only strong and deep marks in the marble in those places where he wished his work to appear most delicate, without finishing or softening off any part; giving, in fine, to his statue a countenance capable of striking terror into the beholder. When the people saw this it drew down first their merriment, but at last their anger; so that they were on the point of stoning both him and his work, if he had not had recourse to entreaties, promising to do his best to correct it. From that time he kept the figure enveloped, feigning to be engaged in retouching it; nor would he allow any person to see it. Nor even, after it had been set up on the pillar, would he permit the veil to be removed, until the statue of his competitor had been likewise placed. When this was done, and he had uncovered his work, the people, in despite of their envy, could not help admiring the capacity of Phidias, or giving him the praise and approbation he merited, while they expressed contempt for the statue of Alcamenes. And in fact, says Tzetzes, nothing remained of all the fine chiselling and meretricious colouring of the figure of Alcamenes, which appeared scarcely more than a straight trunk, without form or art; whilst in that of Phidias, with its strong and deep lines, those parts which, seen close, appeared so irregular and uncombined to the eyes of the spectator, fell into parts so just, so delicate, and well-proportioned, in their remoteness, that one could gaze at it for ever. O! wonderful Phidias; O! fortunate Athenians.

A word now about the "meretricious colouring" here alluded to. It seems clear that the principal Grecian temples were decorated externally with colours; although, as this fact is opposed to our notions of the pureness of Greek taste, it was for a long time opposed violently and disbelieved. Pausanias describes two of the courts of justice in Athens as "the Green" and "the Red," from their colours; and says the temple of Theseus and one wing of the Propylæum were decorated with paintings. Vitruvius speaks of triglyphs painted with blue wax. And many of the Greek buildings which remain, and have been examined, present indubitable vestiges of colour. M. Hittorff, of Paris, was the first who adopted the system of polychromic architecture in its fulness, and asserted that all the members of classic architecture were painted; and although his views were combatted by some learned writers, they have not been successfully controverted. The positive colours were employed.

The Parthenon was painted with blue, red, and green, and the mouldings were ornamented with meanders and leaves: the entablature was adorned with gilded shields, and still presents the circular stain made by them, and the holes for the clamps, by which they were secured to the masonry.

It is maintained by those who dislike to yield the opinion that the essential character of Greek architecture is based wholly on *form*, that the colours were applied at a more recent period than that of the erection of the temples. In many cases, however, it would seem clear that the mouldings had been expressly formed to receive coloured decorations. You must have seen recently in *The Builder*, notices of a long discussion on the subject, by the architects of London, and probably wondered that any should be found to question the fact, in the face of the evidence offered, whatever their opinion might be as to the desirability of reviving the practice. The Chevalier Von Kleuze, architect to the king of Bavaria, has illustrated polychromic architecture, in a small temple at Munich, and M. Hittorff has applied the principle at the Olympic Circus, erected by him, in the *Champs Elysées*, in Paris. A modern writer wickedly proposes, that as we do not care much for our National Gallery, we should paint that to try the effect. Our climate is not favourable to external paintings, but there are many materials which might be used to produce an agreeable diversity of colour. I may mention that the Xanthian marbles in the British Museum, which are specimens of very early art, display traces of colour. Indeed, colour was used by all the early nations,—in Egypt, in Babylon, in Nineveh.

I referred just now to Munich and the late king of Bavaria, and I am tempted to step out of my way here, and allude briefly to the extraordinary works which have been effected in Munich, through the liberality and energy of the sovereign alluded to. Within the last thirty years, the aspect of that city has been changed, a crowd of important buildings has been raised, and a new school of artists created. The Glyptothèca, commenced in 1816, and finished in 1830, is 220 feet square. The Pinacothèca, completed six years later, is above 500 feet long; and (not to speak of the Basilica of St. Boniface, the church of All Saints, and numerous other monuments) the Walhalla, near Ratisbon, rose "like an exhalation," from the rock on which it is reared, to immortalise its projector. Munich has become one of the most extraordinary capitals in Europe, and strangers, from all countries, annually flock thither to admire its beauties, and wonder at the effect which may be produced by one energetic mind. Not satisfied with merely raising fine buildings, Lewis of Bavaria sought to nationalize the fine arts, and bring them into the homes of his people for their

* No. VIII. See also pp. 100, 133, 164, 198, 239, 360, and 388.

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